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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3255

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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 5016

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 5047

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 8010

RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2787

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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 9640

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 8133

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3186

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 NEW DELHI 002998

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/01/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KDEM](#) [PBTS](#) [KISL](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: TERRORISTS MASSACRE 35 HINDUS IN J&K AFTER
PEACEFUL, FESTIVE ELECTIONS

REF: A. NEW DELHI 2875

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 2789

[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 2561

[1](#)D. 05 NEW DELHI 8073

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Classified By: Charge Robert Blake, Jr. for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (U) This is an Action Request for PA and SCA. Please see
Para 18.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: Terrorism raised its ugly head in J&K twice,
after April 30 and May 1 attacks in Jammu left over 35 Hindus
dead in an attempt to fan the flames of religious hatred and
spoil the atmosphere before PM Singh meets with moderate
separatists on May 3. The terror attacks followed by almost
a week the most peaceful (and best attended) elections the
state has seen in recent years, when voters on April 24
turned out in large numbers for four state assembly
by-elections, including three in the Valley. Election
officials reported above-expected turnout at all
constituencies despite hardliner calls for boycotts. A
festival-like atmosphere was evident at all 10 of the crowded
polling stations Poloff and Pol FSN visited. Although the
voting mechanics were geared to minimize election
irregularities, fraud allegations chased this election as
they do most anywhere in India. Other signs of normalcy
returning to the Valley were evident, however, in the visible
uptick in tourism despite the multiple grenade attacks of the
prior week (Ref C).

¶3. (C) Post-elections, a curious exchange of possible CBMs flew past: the Central Bureau of Investigation threw the book at a handful of paramilitary officers (including a Brigadier) for allegedly having staged the killing of five civilians. The CBI action helped to address the moderate separatists' concerns over human rights issues in J&K and if it plays out well, it could improve the atmosphere for the PM's May 3 follow-up meeting with the Mirwaiz Umar Farooq faction of the Hurriyat, which may in turn lead to much-desired Hurriyat participation in the PM's May 25 J&K "all-parties" roundtable. The recent burst in terrorist attacks will cast a shadow over the PM-Hurriyat talks and the roundtable, but are unlikely to cancel either interaction. In that regard, the terrorists' threats and attacks failed to intimidate Kashmiris from voting, failed to dissuade the Hurriyat from talking to the PM, failed to spark religious violence, and failed to deter India from pursuing a policy of democracy and dialogue in J&K. Embassy recommends a strong statement of condemnation by the USG (see draft in Para 18) that also endorses dialogue and the further full exercise of democracy. End Summary.

Terrorists Return to Massacre

¶4. (SBU) The May snow melt marked a return to the horrific and bloody violence that followed last October's earthquake (Ref D). As melting snow began to open passages that permit terrorists to move back and forth between Indian and Pakistani Kashmir, J&K police stated that Islamist terrorists rounded up and killed 22 Hindus in a remote village in Doda district of Jammu, Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad's home area. The massacre followed an attack in the Jammu region April 30 in which 10-13 Hindus were killed (police reporting varies) after being taken from their homes in the evening,

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and an April 27 grenade attack in the resort town of Pehelgam that injured several Gujarati tourists. The May 1 Doda attack was seen as a direct slap at Azad, as well as an attack on the electoral process. By killing Hindus, the terrorists also avoid the opprobrium heaped upon them for past tactics that killed many Kashmiri Muslims and negate calls by peaceful separatists for 600,000 Hindus displaced by ethnic cleansing in the 1990s to return to Kashmir. The terrorists are also again showing their violent rejection of the Prime Minister's scheduled May 3 dialogue with the moderate Hurriyat and his planned May 25 roundtable. Kashmiri separatists, including the Mirwaiz, non-Hurriyat moderates Shabir Shah and Yasin Malik, and pro-Pakistan hardliner SAS Geelani, all publicly denounced the attack. While no group has yet claimed responsibility for the massacre, the Hizbul Mujahideen strongly condemned the killings, indicating a further split in tactics among such groups.

Democracy Wins

¶5. (U) The massacre followed the very successful April 24 by-election that POL FSN accurately described as "an election mela (festival)." Queues at the larger polling stations we visited numbered over 100 deep by mid-day. Because the government and large businesses were closed for the elections (and some areas observed a "bandh" or strike, with small shops shuttered throughout the day due to the threat of terrorist violence), many voters had time on their hands, which they spent chatting with their neighbors outside voting booths while their children ran and played. (NOTE: As in the US, many polling stations were set up on public property, usually schools. End Note.) Even the one crowd of approximately fifty young men outside a polling station who were boycotting the election did so peacefully, and stood at a respectable distance from the entrance to the polling booths; also notable was that they were comfortable telling Poloff and Pol FSN that they were boycotting, well within

earshot of J&K police.

¶16. (U) At every polling station save one (see Para 9 below), voters enthusiastically showed Poloff and Pol FSN their inked forefingers to demonstrate that they had exercised their franchise. They also generally laughed and refused to disclose who they had voted for when asked, although several quickly launched into diatribes excoriating one or another political party, alleging a combination of corruption, mismanagement, and taking voters for granted.

Election Mechanics

¶17. (U) Polling agents representing the various political parties checked the address and identity documents of each voter as he or she entered the courtyard area outside the voting booth, and, upon validating the voter, issued him or her a chit. Typically, two or three polling agents staffed each polling station, to guarantee fairness. In larger polling stations that accommodated more than one voting district, the voter was then triaged into the line designated for his or her neighborhood. At the booth, he or she would surrender the chit to a GOI election official, who would ink the voter's index finger and electronically activate the digital voting machine in a booth several feet away from the

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official. The voter would touch the appropriate key -- candidates were designated by name and political; party symbol -- and the vote would register on the official's terminal. The third piece of the voting machine, the database storing the votes cast for each candidate, was kept off to the side and ostensibly untouched; these were collected at the end of the day and held by the Election Commission, which tabulated the votes off-site and announced the results on April 27.

Usual Allegations of Election Shenanigans

¶18. (SBU) Some level of voter fraud allegations are inevitably levied during any Indian election, and more so in J&K than others; Post is not in a position to corroborate or refute any of them. Poloff and Pol FSN visited 10 polling stations within three Legislative Assembly constituencies, out of approximately 270 polling stations total. Adhering to security protocols, all stations visited were sited along major roads, none were located within villages:

-- J&K newspapers ran at least three separate stories claiming underage girls had cast ballots; in addition to the girls' statements, the stories featured photographs of the girls proudly displaying their ink-stained forefingers.

-- Political party spokespeople complained in the press of opposition "mobile voters" -- citizens of a politically safe district being driven to cast their votes in a more competitive district.

-- Journalists we talked to said that both the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and the National Conference (NC) were blaming each other for having put up posters that carried an alleged warning from Hizbul Mujahadeen (which is alleged to be cozy with the PDP) for voters to stay away from the polls, presumably to scare away opposition voters.

-- Kashmiri newspaper articles and local POL contacts claimed that some illiterate voters came to the polls asking to vote for a particular candidate but not knowing which political party (and hence which symbol) the candidate was associated with; this left open the possibility that these voters were directed to vote for someone other than the candidate they wished to support.

Healthy Turnout

¶9. (C) Officials estimated 40-70% of voters turned out, marking a higher participation than in any election since the Kashmir insurgency began in 1989. (NOTE: The variance reported reflected different constituencies; the high of 70% was for Chief Minister Azad's Jammu constituency, 40% participation was reported for the Srinagar constituency closest to the LoC, which included Geelani's home base, and the other two constituencies reported in the 55-60% range. End Note.) The election official at one polling station told Poloff and Pol FSN that, in the first three hours after polls opened, only a handful of voters had shown up (COMMENT: All other polling stations visited reported brisk attendance from before polls opened at 7 am. End Comment.) A flood of voters around noontime put this polling station closer to parity with others visited. Although impossible to

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corroborate, one theory is that security forces might have been sent to "round up voters" to ensure they were not boycotting; an alternative and more viable explanation is that voters for this one booth stayed away at first fearing election violence, and only came out to vote after hearing that the vote was progressing peacefully.

Election Results: PDP Takes Drubbing

¶10. (SBU) The PDP took a drubbing in the April 24 J&K by-elections, winning only one of four seats up for grabs (Dilawar Mir, whose brother was killed by terrorists in 2001). Congress Party Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad won his contest in Bandarwah, Jammu, which enabled him to keep his position (his winning margin was 62,000 votes out of 92,000 cast). Other winners included independent candidate Shoaib Lone, son of assassinated J&K Education Minister Ghulam Nabi Lone (Ref D), and Farooq Abdullah's younger brother Dr. Mustafa Kamal (NC), who upset Shia cleric Maulvi Iftikhar Ansari. Per our conversations with journalists and voters in Srinagar (Ref B), the main issues were local, including education and water. But the real winners here were the voters and the democratic process. (COMMENT: Given our past interactions with PDP President Mehbooba Mufti, we expect her to accuse the Congress party of having bloodied the PDP's nose in the polls, under the assumption that Congress either wants a firmer position in the two-party coalition or plans to dump the PDP for the NC. End Comment.)

Tourism Ticking Up

¶11. (SBU) According to Poloff's and Pol FSN's observations, tourism during the election period, even after the April 14 series of grenade attacks in Srinagar (Ref C), was healthy. At least three of the nine daily Delhi-Srinagar flights (including Poloff's) were fully booked, and a Jet Airways executive said that all flights, including those originating in Mumbai, showed strong future bookings, especially from Maharashtra and Gujarat. According to Pol FSN (who has been a regular traveler to J&K since the early 1990s), occupancy at the hotel was the highest he had witnessed since the 1980s; shops in downtown Srinagar catering to tourists, which had in the past opened only for a few hours each afternoon, were back to their pre-terrorism schedules and raking in enough business to justify doing so. The volume of pedestrians strolling along Dal Lake stretched a typical five minute car ride to nearly 45 minutes. Assuming the level of violence remains generally low throughout the summer, 2006 may be the best tourist season for J&K in years. Even the May 1 massacre will not dissuade tourists, as it took place in an extremely remote village far from well-secured tourist destinations.

Progress on Human Rights

¶12. (SBU) In a stunning and welcome development, the "Indian Express" on April 27 reported that the CBI plans to charge five Army officers with the March 24, 2000 abduction and killing of five reportedly unarmed and innocent Kashmiris for having ostensibly massacred 35 Sikh villagers in Chittisinghpora, during President Clinton's visit to India. The officers -- a Brigadier, a lieutenant colonel, two majors

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and a subedar (junior commissioned officer equivalent to a CW2) -- face multiple charges including fabricating evidence and witness statements, burying the bodies before they were examined, falsely displaying arms and ammunition as having been seized, and lying about what weapons the officers used in the engagement. The bodies of three of the five civilians were badly burned despite the officers' having reported they died of gunshot wounds, and none of the officers was injured in what they called a "major gun battle." The officers were all serving at the time in the 7th Rashtriya Rifles.

¶13. (SBU) According to Indian newspaper reports, evidence of the officers' crime began to emerge as early as April 2000, when relatives of the five purported terrorists began protesting against the J&K security forces, leading to police killing 10 during a demonstration that month. The case against the alleged assailants continued to crumble when the "link" person between Chittisinghpora and another terrorist attack was exonerated (November 2000) and a district government official publicly stated the five civilians were in fact innocent (April 2001). Despite these developments, it took the GOI six years before issuing even an announcement of pending charges against the soldiers. (NOTE: Encounter killings are a national issue that we will explore in greater depth Septel.)

GOI and Hurriyat Exchanging CBMs?

¶14. (C) Amid this hopeful season of Delhi-Srinagar dialogue, there is circumstantial evidence that an informal exchange of confidence building measures might be underway. Under this theory, the GOI is investigating the five officers as an unstated quid-pro-quo for low-key formulaic Hurriyat opposition to the polls. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that this progress on human rights tracks with the suggestions the Hurriyat put forward when they met the PM in September 2005. Under this theory, the next set of tit-for-tat CBMs would be the second PM-Hurriyat meeting on May 3, to be followed (possibly) by Hurriyat participation in the PM's May 25 roundtable discussion in Srinagar.

¶15. (C) Hurriyat Executive Member Bilal Lone told us he expects the PM to ask the Hurriyat to participate in the second J&K roundtable fixed for May 25; the Hurriyat will probably not decide firmly until after meeting the PM. Non-Hurriyat separatist Yasin Malik will likely rely on his upcoming trip to the US for surgery and stump speeches (Ref A) as a face-saving excuse to miss the roundtable (which we surmise he would be perfectly happy to duck, thereby burnishing his Srinagar street cred) without looking like an obstructionist, which his Indian handlers would resent.

As the Talking Continues

¶16. (C) The Mirwaiz on May 1 announced that five Hurriyat Executive Committee members -- Bilal Lone, Professor Abdul Gani Bhatt, Maulvi Abbas Ansari, Fazl Haque Qureshi, and Aga Syed Hassan -- would join him in meeting PM Singh in Delhi. He publicly distanced the PM-Hurriyat meeting from the PM's larger Kashmir roundtable set for May 25, and it is clear that if the first meeting does not meet the separatists' standards for positive movement, they will abstain from the second. Although the Mirwaiz also called for "concrete

concessions," given the fractured and disorganized nature of the Hurriyat, the group may not yet even know what will make them happy.

Comment

¶17. (C) With melting snow clearing the mountain passes, terrorist infiltration could well increase and massacres such as those of April 30 and May 1 may happen again, although they will not disrupt the Prime Minister's efforts with Islamabad and Srinagar. As outsiders, we hope the political momentum generated in J&K by the GOI's support for democracy and dialogue will produce lasting and not simply ephemeral results. The most useful assistance we have to offer is to find ways to further degrade the ability for terrorists (who threaten both countries) to carry out cross-border attacks. We should also praise dialogue and elections and condemn terrorism. To that end, we recommend the Department issue the draft statement in para 18. End Comment.

Action Request: Draft Statement

¶18. (U) Action Request for SCA and PA: Post recommends the Department issue a statement along the lines below:

Begin text of draft statement:

The United States condemns the April 30 and May 1 terrorist massacres that left dead some 35 civilians in India's Jammu and Kashmir state. Such attacks underline the cowardly tactics of terrorist groups that punish and intimidate innocent people for exercising their basic human rights, including their rights to worship as they wish and to have a voice in selecting their leaders.

End text of draft statement.

¶19. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
BLAKE